

Chapters One and Two

In this really interesting and potentially paradigm shifting monograph, Le Donne argues that the title Son of David 'provides a unique window into the Jesus tradition and has received remarkably little attention in biblical scholarship' (p. 1). He argues, further, that 'memory theory' has a significant role to play in unraveling what's Historical of the Historical Jesus.

Jesus can be examined and discussed as a historical figure as long as history is thought of in terms of memory refraction. ... I argue that all perception is bent in the mnemonic process and that historical memory is best understood in this way.

From this overarching thesis, explained in the Introduction, Le Donne moves in the second chapter to describe what he understands of Hermeneutics and History. So naturally he makes use of Spinoza, Lessing, von Ranke, Heidegger and Bultmann and their views of 'history'. Hence, the second chapter is something of a 'philosophy of history'. This so that in the third chapter Le Donne can describe more fully what he means by 'memory refraction' and how that theory might be useful for biblical interpretation.

Le Donne draws three conclusions at the end of chapter two: 1) If perceptions are to be remembered, then they will inevitably be interpreted - subconsciously, consciously, or both. 2) Perceptions that contribute to historical memory are thus always interpreted along each stage of the tradition that they inhabit. And 3) The historian is never able to interpret an uninterpreted past.

True all. Though #2 still needs to be demonstrated, so far as I am concerned. Indeed, it's quite possible for memory to be distorted intentionally or unintentionally so that the trajectory from which it came is utterly and completely obscured, and lost. Hence, any further movement forward along the memory trail is likewise utterly obscured.

To this point Le Donne has simply laid the groundwork- as he will continue to do in

Chapters Three and Four

In chapter three Le Donne 'introduces several memory theorists and historiographers who are not as well known but who have made considerable advances upon the theories already surveyed' (p. 41). And though the survey is important enough, Le Donne doesn't really get to the heart of the matter until chapter four.

In the latter chapter he argues that 'the analysis of memory refraction provides the Jesus historian a means to locate and chart historical memories that betray typological interpretation' (p. 65) which sounds to me very much like a subset of good old Tradition Criticism. And in fact, as Le Donne describes his procedure I find myself constantly thinking 'but isn't this just Tradition Criticism with a new name?' (and Le Donne recognizes this as well).

To be sure, that's a rather simplified reading of a very complex chapter and since he has the rest of the book to make his point (the exegetical sections beginning in the next chapter) he may well be and probably is doing something more than Tradition Criticism. How much more remains to be seen.

But consider this sentence:

If it can be determined that the perceivers of John (the Baptist) had certain prophetic expectations of him before they actually perceived him, such pre-categorization of John would have inevitably colored (refracted) their actual perceptions of him (p. 69).

'Prophetic expectations', 'pre-categorization' - these sound to me just like Tradition Criticism.

The conclusion of the chapter is a nod in the direction of the historical-critical method and the various criteria Historical Jesus scholarship uses to determine authenticity.

Chapter Five

Le Donne notes at the opening of Chapter Five 'The remainder of this book examines the title 'Son of David' with an aim to (1) ascertain the title's entry point into the Jesus tradition, (2) analyze the ways that it was mnemonically refracted in the interpretation of Jesus' ministry ... and (3) discuss how this refracted the more developed ... Jesus tradition in early Christianity (p. 93). So, in light of that aim, Le Donne attempts to persuade his readers that in the Hebrew Bible we are to understand Solomon when we read 'Son of David'. Which of course is true. But that doesn't automatically mean much of anything for the Jesus tradition.

But it is meaningful when Le Donne wisely remarks 'When language is routinely exported from a cultural archetype and employed in the description of a new category, we must entertain the possibility of typology' (p. 100). I would add that we must also think of this as nothing other than our old friend the historical-critical method known as *Traditionsgeschichte*.

Le Donne's exegesis in the remainder of the chapter is quite well done (though my only quibble is that he misspells Sigmund Mowinckel's name on page 98, second full paragraph – still he gets it right in the footnote and in other sections of the chapter, so it's not too grand a quibble). He looks in some detail at the phrase 'Son of David' in connection with 2 Sam 7 (as we should expect given his purpose), 1 Chr 17, Is 11:1-9, and most extensively in Ps of Sol 17. All in all, doing a fine job.

The remainder of the book, chapters 6-9, will be reviewed and posted subsequently.